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ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



Swift Creek Asbestos Site, Whatcom County, Washington

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10

November 2007

EPA to help stabilize eroded banks along Swift Creek

At the request of Whatcom County, EPA will use its Superfund authority to reconfigure stockpiles of asbestos-contaminated dredged materials along Swift Creek to help reduce the potential for asbestos being spread to other areas due to flooding.

EPA will use heavy equipment to move stockpiled dredge material to areas along the creek bank where erosion has weakened the bank. This work will help reduce the chance of flooding in Swift Creek which could spread asbestos from existing dredge piles to neighboring properties.

A dust suppressant will also be applied to the stockpiled materials to help prevent people from being exposed to wind-blown asbestos. If conditions become too wet for heavy equipment and trucks to maneuver, EPA will complete this work when conditions allow.

Work will begin during the week of November 5th and is expected to last about one week. We are coordinating with property owners to gain access for the work.

Workers will be required to wear protective gear including respirator masks to prevent exposures to asbestos while working on the site.

Background

A large landslide in the upper watershed of the Sumas Mountain is a significant source of sediment in Swift Creek. The landslide material contains naturally occurring asbestos and elevated levels of metals.

Dredging has been used to maintain the Swift Creek channel to prevent flooding. In the past, dredged material was stockpiled on either side of the creek and removed by the public and contractors for a variety of uses. Removing dredged material from the banks of Swift Creek for public uses is no longer allowed due to renewed human health concerns about asbestos in the sediments.

The Whatcom County Health Department asked EPA to evaluate potential risks to human health from the stockpiled material. EPA coordinated this evaluation with the Washington Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Health, Agency for Toxic

Substances and Disease Registry, and Whatcom County. EPA's sampling demonstrated that asbestos fibers in the dredge piles can get into a person's breathing zone during routine activities, such as raking and shoveling.

Because of potential health risks from exposure to asbestos, EPA recommended that people should no longer remove dredged materials from the site without protective gear, and that dredged materials should not be taken to other locations where people may be exposed to it. The County has taken measures to restrict public access to the stockpiled material.

EPA has encouraged a multi-agency approach to assist the County with how to manage dredged sediments from Swift Creek. There is no single agency with the authority and resources needed to address this complex situation.

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On the web: Fact sheets and technical documents for Swift Creek are posted on EPA's web site at:
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/sites/swiftcreek>

Alternative formats are available. For reasonable accommodation, please call Monica Tonel. TTY users, please call the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339.

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